

Message Text

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AMCONSUL KARACHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAHORE 0701

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: BHUTTO AND PUNJAB POLITICAL CRISIS

REF: LAHORE 0679

1. PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO MOVED FROM LAHORE TO MULTAN JUNE 15 TO CONTINUE DISCUSSIONS WITH POLITICAL LEADERS ABOUT KHAR-RAMAY SQUABBLE. BEFORE LEAVING LAHORE, HE TOLD NEWSMEN HE PLANNED TO RETURN TO CITY AFTER PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY BUDGET SESSION (END OF JUNE) "TO TAKE SOME IMPORTANT DECISIONS." AFTER ACKNOWLEDGING THAT DISCUSSIONS HAD BEEN DIFFICULT, HE ASSERTED TO PRESS THAT THERE WAS "NO FUNDAMENTAL CRISIS" IN PUNJAB, AND THAT SITUATION WAS MERELY "UNNECESSARY MIS-UNDERSTANDING WHICH COULD ALWAYS BE REMOVED BY DIALOGUE AND DISCUSSIONS."

2. HOWEVER, PRIME MINISTER WARNED THAT HIS RETURN TO LAHORE WOULD BE CONTINGENT UPON PUNJAB MPA'S "BEHAVING WITH POISE AND DIGNITY, AND COMPLETING THE CURRENT (BUDGET) SESSION IN A MANNER BEFITTING REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE." HE SAID HE WOULD RETURN ONLY ON CONDITION THAT ASSEMBLY SESSION HAD "SMOOTH SAILING, WITHOUT FACTIONALISM OR QUARRELS." OUR CONTACTS TELL US
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PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT WAS PROMPTED BY THREAT FROM

GOVERNOR KHAR TO ORDER HIS SUPPORTERS IN PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY TO DEBATE AGAINST CHIEF MINISTER RAMAY'S PRESENTATION OF BUDGET, AND TO WALK OUT OF SESSION IF NECESSARY. DESPITE BHUTTO'S WARNING, THERE IS LITTLE CONFIDENCE HERE THAT KHAR WILL RESTRAIN HIS FRIENDS AND SUPPORT RAMAY'S BUDGET.

3. ASKED BY JOURNALISTS IF HE WAS SATISFIED WITH HIS VISIT TO LAHORE, BHUTTO SAID HE HAD HELD "VERY FRANK" DISCUSSIONS WITH PPP MPA'S AND THAT HE HAD EXPLAINED TO THEM IN PLAIN TERMS IMPLICATIONS OF INSTABILITY, DAMAGE WHICH COULD BE CAUSED BY "GROUPINGS, AND THE HARM TO THIS GREAT PROVINCE AND TO THE COUNTRY IF PETTY QUARRELS ASSUME A LARGER PROPORTION." HE SAID PRESENT SITUATION WAS BASED ON NUMBER OF FACTORS, INCLUDING "INEXPERIENCE AND IMMATURITY" OF CERTAIN PARTICIPANTS (READ KHAR). HE ADDED THAT THOSE FACTORS HAD PROMPTED REACTION OF "INTOLERANCE" AND "LACK OF ACCOMMODATION" RATHER THAN RESTRAINT (READ RAMAY). HE SAID PROBLEM WAS NOT "TEMPER OF THE ISSUE" BUT "TEMPER OF THE INDIVIDUALS."

4. MEANWHILE, THE TWO PROTAGONISTS CONTINUED TO PRESS FOR ACCEPTANCE OF THEIR VIEWS AMID GROWING SPECULATION THAT BHUTTO WILL REMOVE THEM BOTH. KHAR HAS TOLD HIS SUPPORTERS HE IS PRESSING PRIME MINISTER TO ACCEPT HIS DEMAN THAT HE BE ALLOWED TO REMAIN AS GOVERNOR WITH SOME POWERS, AND THAT IF BHUTTO REFUSES, HE WILL LEAVE PPP, TAKING 52 MPA'S WITH HIM. RAMAY USED VEHICLE OF BUDGET SPEECH IN PUNJAB ASSEMBLY TO PUBLICLY REMIND LISTENERS (AND BHUTTO) ABOUT PPP'S FORMAL COMMITMENT TO SOCIALISM. HE ALSO TAKES EVERY CONCEIVABLE OCCASION TO DISPLAY SUPREME CONFIDENCE THAT HE WILL WIN ARGUMENT WITH KHAR AND REMAIN AS CHIEF MINISTER (E.G., HE HAS READILY ACCEPTED INVITATION TO JULY FOURTH RECEPTION AND HAS ANNOUNCED PLANS FOR SEPTEMBER ACTIVITIES).

5. COMMENT: PUNJAB'S HIGHLY PERSONALIZED POLITICS HAVE ONCE AGAIN SERVED TO WHET PUBLIC INTEREST IN PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE, BUT IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT BHUTTO REALLY FINDS CURRENT EVENTS PLEASING, THOUGH SOME OF THEM MAY BE OF HIS OWN MAKING. AS OFTEN BEFORE, WE ARE ATTRACTED

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TO THEORY THAT PRIME MINISTER IS ENGAGED IN PROMPTING TWO LIEUTENANTS SQUARE OFF AGAINST EACH OTHERNSO THAT NEITHER CAN BECOME STRONG ENOUGH TO THREATEN HIM. IN THIS PARTICULAR INSTANCE, WE ARE BEGINNING TO WONDER IF HE WILL ALLOW EITHER KHAR OR RAMAY TO WIN THE BATTLE -- NOW. THAT LEADS US TO SPECULATE THAT BOTH WILL BE REPLACED, PROBABLY LATER IN SUMMER.
GRIFFIN

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